DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 192 246 CS 005 597

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TITLE The Teacher, the Reader, the Learning Environment: A Match or Mismatch Proposition.
PUB DATE May 80
NOTE 11p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (25th, St. Louis, MO, May 5-9, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Environment: Elementary Secondary Education: Environmental Influences; Literature Reviews: *Reading Achievement; State of the Art Reviews: *Student Characteristics; *Student Teacher Relationship: *Teacher Behavior: *Teacher Characteristics

ABSTRACT

Stressing the need to match teacher behaviors, student characteristics, and learning environments for successful reading instruction, this review of research considers a variety of factors that can help and hinder student reading achievement. The factors discussed include the characteristics of good teaching, circumstances that hinder student gains in reading ability, organization of students for instruction, the types of teaching techniques that teachers use (whether directive or nondirective), typical behaviors that interfer with learning, and characteristics of "teachable" students. (RL)

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THE TEACHER, THE READER, THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:

A MATCH OR MISMATCH PROPOSITION

by

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Southwest Missouri State University

May, 1980

CS005597

Poor teaching is the basis of children not being able to learn. Robinson (1946) in her classical study stated that poor teaching (not necessarily teachers) was a major cause of reading failure. That position was confirmed by Bond and Dykstra (1967) in the first grade studies. They concluded that the teacher is the one variable that makes the difference. But if the teacher accounts for the variance in children's learning, why are good teachers not always successful? What about all the great, wonderful teachers? Still, certain children did not show progress.

Recently, researchers' attention has returned to the teacher. One of the most extensive lists was published in Reading World, 1977 by Rupley and Blair who later encorporated the characteristics of good teaching in their book: Reading Diagnosis and Remediation published by Rand McNally, 1979. In their research review, Rupley and Blair collected 25 or more tasks that teachers should employ to be more effective teachers. But except for one item that specified individual conferences with students, none of the items related to the teachers' personality traits and linguistic conduct.

There is a wealth of research that may be interpreted to mean that children's success in beginning reading may be hindered by the following:

1. The lack of a smooth transition from home to school
2. The gap between the teacher's language and the child's language
3. The teacher's unrealistic expectation of the children
4. The children's level of language and self-expectation; the children go to school to learn to read, and do not
5. The employment of beginning reading materials that are not commensurate with the children's total development

Add that kind of a beginning to the first five or six years of life when the children's personalities have emerged. The resulting problem could be very complex.

Teachers' ability to organize the children may be the chief cause of their failure. One of the most outstanding recommendations that has been offered to overcome the plight of children entering school for the first time was offered by Seaver and Cartwright (1976; 1977). It was echoed and expanded by Range, Layton, and Roubinek (1980).

Seaver and Cartwright believed the following:

1. eclectic programs were only patchwork of traditional views.
2. prospective teachers should learn to employ the practice of teaching three approaches to their preschool students: (1) behavioristic, (2) maturational, and (3) cognitivist.

Then the prospective teachers would teach in schools that could provide those specific situations.

Also, it was recommended that prospective teachers learn of children's characteristics and teacher's characteristics that can be matched. Additionally, if early childhood teachers could learn to visit homes and determine the child's characteristics and mother's (family) teaching style and transfer that knowledge to school then have parents in to school-style. Then, teachers and parents working cooperatively can slowly transfer teaching techniques and alter their behaviors to benefit the child.

That's the challenge of today--to learn to alter teachers' behaviors to meet the needs of the children. What do we know?

Characteristics of Good Teachers, Hughs (1959)

1. The ability to control

2. Impose
3. Facilitate
4. Develop content
5. Respond to the needs
6. Affect students in positive or negative directions.

Flanders (1960) write that teachers who influenced superior attitudes and achievement possessed two characteristics.

1. did not follow a rigid behavioral-instructional pattern.
2. exhibited varied interactive abilities characterized by both dominative support (tell students what to do) and reflective, differential support (guide students to choices)

Kagan, Sontag, Baker, and Nelson (1958) would add the ability to interact and to stimulate children to high achievement. Still, there is little in the way to indicate exactly how teachers should do, or should be taught to do those things.

Stern (1963) reviewed studies of directive and nondirective teaching techniques. He concluded that nondirective techniques resulted in shifting students attitudes in favorable and acceptable directions. Stern (1963) and Ryans' (1960) work could be combined to include the characteristics that good teachers were nondirective and nonrigid while still directing and maintaining control of student learning. The idea is that the teacher is highly structured, in control, but not authoritarian.

Ryans also reported, that teachers who were rated as good were cheerful, confident, and ranked high on a test of social maturity. Heil, Powell, Feifer (1960) identified three teacher personalities related to student achievement and teacher success. Those characteristics were

that the teachers were well-integrated or self-controlled, consistent, structured, and orderly. They were effective with all types of students. Personality two consisted of teachers who were weakly-integrated or fearful. Those teachers were not consistent, orderly structured and feared to exhibit control. They were found to be ineffective with all students except those who were self-directive and/or striving for achievement. Personality three included teachers who employed defensive-intellect or turbulent behaviors. They were effective only with children who would conform to authoritarian behaviors or those students who were self-directive.

In addition to those characteristics, Cogan (1956) studied students' work habits. The students revealed that they did more required and extra homework for teachers they perceived as integrated. Those teacher behaviors included the following:

1. Accepting, clarifying, supportive of ideas and thoughts
2. Praising and encouraging student endeavors
3. Asking stimulating questions
4. Asking questions (not telling) to orient students to assigned tasks

Students did not work well under teachers who were totally dominative in their behaviors.

Dominative teacher characteristics included the following:

1. Presenting knowledge; expressing personal ideas
2. Constantly giving directions and orders
3. Changing behavior through critical and depreciative remarks
4. Justifying personal position and authority by using transfer and name dropping devices

As a summary to those characteristics listed above, the works of Rosenshine and Furst (1971) may be helpful. They listed ten teacher characteristics that were related to students' upward gains in achievement. Those characteristics were as follows:

1. Degree of organization of lesson and clearness of presentation
2. Provisions for variability in materials and assignments
3. Orientation of students' to tasks in a businesslike manner
4. Degree of enthusiasm and voice quality and control
5. Criticism techniques in rejecting behavior
6. Acknowledgement and praise of students and their ideas (appropriate shaping and modeling) to change ideas
7. Employment of signals, review periods and structuring statements during the lesson
8. Providing structured lessons in which students will learn
9. Asking questions which required literal, divergent, and convergent thinking
10. Matching lesson and materials to students' abilities

Add to that list, the earlier characteristics of an integrated teacher and self-controlled, nondirective teacher who is emotionally stable, non-rigid with the ability to be interactive with students. Then the psychological atmosphere of the classroom may be at an optimum level. But as with any recipe, there are more ingredients to be added. What about the perfect master teacher? Can a mismatch between teacher and student occur?

Amidon and Flanders identified two types of students:

1. dependent prone students who must have support from a teacher or other adult

2. independent prone students who are self-directed and need only minimal support. Those students can work well without teacher support or even clearly defined goals. Perhaps one of the first steps will be for teachers to identify these two groups.

But Jersild and Tasch's (1949) study must be considered. They found that academic achievement and intellectual pursuit declines with advancement through the grades (a natural deterioration). Jersild and Tasch also contended that high school and young adult behaviors could be predicted from behaviors during the first four years of elementary school. Dependent-prone students will usually learn more (in terms of "what is to be learned" based on goals and objectives). They will call on teachers more and want more direction. Independent students will forge ahead without aid. Dependent-prone students will comply with directions of authority figures, conform to peer group and family pressures, and ultimately become obsessed with pleasing teachers. They must have acceptance, support, encouragement, and approval.

Independent prone students achieve as a result of curiosity and intense desire (for whatever reason) to achievement. Do we need approaches for both? Natural deterioration of desire with age (whether the teacher is integrative or dominative) and the 3 teacher characteristics, will have much to do with what takes place in the classroom between the teacher and the students, and among the students.

Grimes and Allinsmith stated that learning results from induced anxiety. The task to be learned must be so-designed that anxiety is produced; learning or success reduces the anxiety. Grimes and Allinsmith reported that in learning phonics anxious compulsive children learned better through highly controlled, structured situations. It may be that

unstructured lessons may result in depressed learning for anxious children. It may also be noted that developing an appropriate anxiety-producing learning situation for an anxious child may be difficult.

Other behaviors that interfere with learning and teaching are:

1. Work avoidance (whistling, playing, and/or talking)
2. Impulsive Actions

Thelen (1967) identified additional student behaviors that could result in nonlearning. Those characteristics were as follows:

1. Adaptive-social (attend to tasks but employ work avoidance behaviors)
2. Maladaptive-passive (exhibit no behaviors and may be withdrawn)
3. Maladaptive-active or aggressive

Teachable students were termed by Thelen as adaptive-academic. They exhibited appropriate behaviors.

The teachable students exhibited the following behaviors:

1. High degrees of personal, social, psychological abilities
2. Search for strengths (proving they can do)
3. Lack control in search of their strengths
4. Seek to control their strengths through accepting social values and working cooperatively
5. Seek control from teachers and try to identify with teachers

It is clear and simple, mismatches can occur but teachers can do much to make appropriate matches if they are determined to change their behaviors as well as those of the students (Layton, 1979).

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